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# Economic Research Service

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A Bimonthly Newsletter for Economic Research Service Employees and Colleagues

## NASS and ERS Hold Public Listening Sessions

The various constituencies of USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and ERS had a chance to express their views and concerns at four public "listening" sessions. The sessions were held in Memphis, Kansas City, Chicago, and Washington on Feb. 9-10, 10-11, 11-12, and 24-25, respectively. The first day of each session was devoted to technical explanations of NASS and ERS statistics, data, economic indicators, and forecasting programs. The second day was spent listening to constituent comments on the agencies' programs.

The sessions, which were open to the public, provided useful feedback on the quality, content, and timeliness of our reports, unmet information needs, problems with gaining access to information, and program priorities. The feedback from the four sessions will be consolidated and evaluated by NASS and ERS to develop a specific action plan to deal with issues and recommendations.

Participating in some or all of the sessions from ERS were Administrator John Lee, Associate Administrator Bob Robinson, Deputy Administrator Patrick O'Brien, Associate Deputy Administrator Donald Seaborg, and branch chiefs James Johnson and Mack Leath. □



Norman Reid

## U.S. Senate Requests Rural Development Study

The U.S. Senate has requested that ERS prepare a report on alternatives for maintaining and strengthening economic development in rural communities. The first part of the report will analyze the rural economic situation in the 1980's, with particular attention to the performance of the manufacturing, agriculture, natural resource, and service sectors, and to the human resource base of rural economies. The second part of the report will analyze alternative strategies for addressing rural economic adjustment issues, including economywide policies such as macroeconomic and regulatory policies, sector-specific policies such as agricultural policy, infrastructure construction, financial aid policies, human capital development policies, and "social infrastructure" community development policies.

The report, due July 1, will consist of 17 separate papers, of

which ERS staff are preparing about two-thirds. Edward Blakeley and Ted Bradshaw (U. of Calif., Berkeley), Emery Castle and Bruce Weber (Oreg. State U.), William Fox (U. of Tenn.), Willis Goudy and Vern Ryan (Iowa State U.), and Stuart Rosenfeld (Southern Policy Growth Board, Durham) are also preparing papers. □

## Balance Sheet Estimates Improved

ERS annually publishes estimates of the U.S. farm sector balance sheet and other farm financial indicators. The Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System also publishes U.S. farm financial estimates similar to USDA's, yet different enough to cause problems for those who use the data, particularly policymakers. For example, although estimates of balance sheet assets differ by only about 0.5 percent, estimates of real capital gains have differed by an average of 22 percent per year, and estimates of total returns to assets by 17 percent per year.

Which estimates are "correct"? Why do they differ? How can farm financial estimates be improved?

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ERS researcher Kenneth Erickson (786-1799) has been working with Emanuel Melichar (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System) to address these issues. Erickson has documented conceptual and procedural differences between Melichar's *Agricultural Finance Databook* and ERS's balance sheet data. Erickson has also developed item-by-item comparisons of the Federal Reserve and ERS series to evaluate the relative importance of the differences. The dialog has led to procedural changes on both sides that have, in turn, led to more consistent data series. □

## **Farm Costs and Returns Survey Enumerators Trained**

The national training school for the annual *Farm Costs and Returns Survey (FCRS)* was recently held in New Orleans, with over 40 States represented. The survey is a joint project of USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service and ERS. ERS takes an active role in developing the questionnaires, writing the interviewer's manual, teaching at the national (and sometimes State) training school, and editing the questionnaires. ERS researchers Russell Bowe, Robert McElroy, Richard Prescott, David Banker, Michael Salassi, Craig Jagger, Diane Bertelsen, Duane Hacklander, Gregory Hanson, and James Johnson (786-1800) participated in the school.

USDA relies heavily on the survey for a picture of farm financial conditions and cost of production estimates. The *FCRS* collects data on the financial situation of farm operators that is used by ERS to estimate farmers' cash income, costs of production, and net farm income. □



USDA

## **Current Research**

### **Wind Erosion Damages Measured**

ERS economists Linda Lee (786-1444) and Steven Piper are studying the offsite damages from wind erosion in the western United States. The Dust Bowl of the 1930's prompted the creation of many of the current conservation programs, but most research in recent years has focused on the productivity and offsite impacts of water-caused erosion.

Lee and Piper have estimated what wind erosion costs nonagricultural households. Initial findings suggest that the costs of these wind-erosion-caused damages are similar to the offsite water erosion damage cost estimates developed by the Conservation Foundation, which range from \$3 billion to \$13 billion annually.

Available data also show that the offsite costs of wind erosion exceed costs of onsite productivity losses. These results have implications for soil conservation programs in the West. Targeting assistance to offsite damages, not onsite problems, may be an appropriate strategy. □

## **Economic Research Service**

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## **Administrator's Letter – Thanks and Best Wishes to Bob Thompson**

As this newsletter goes to press, USDA's Assistant Secretary for Economics Robert Thompson is preparing to move on to new challenges as the Dean of Agriculture at Purdue University. During his 2 years as Assistant Secretary and his preceding tenure as Senior Staff Economist with the President's Council of Economic Advisers, Bob made important contributions to American agriculture. ERS and USDA's other



economics agencies have benefited from his leadership. More important for the longer term, however, are the lessons that we (individually and collectively) can learn from Bob. The first lesson has to do with standards of excellence. Bob has extraordinary standards for himself and naturally expects no less from others. Despite other duties, he manages to keep himself at the leading edge of professional thinking. His own work is uncompromising in terms of the proper use of theory, methods, and data, as well as effectiveness of presentation and communication. He applies the same standards and expectations to the work of all he reviews. Bob has insisted that good research entails good writing as well. He has encouraged ERS to write for and help educate a wide audience beyond professional economists.

We could also learn a lot about individual achievement and human capacity from Bob. His natural optimism and enthusiasm spur him to maintain a pace that would exhaust others. In addition to prodigious professional accomplishments, he has managed to master many languages and a host of other personal and professional skills.

Bob Thompson also has a sense of the big picture issues. He has helped ERS focus on some broad, integrative studies, and he has posed many other important questions that constitute an ERS agenda yet to be completed. Someone once remarked that Bob sees all economic issues in the context of a general equilibrium model of the world. He understands the interrelatedness of phenomena ranging from agricultural productivity to macroeconomic policies. His broad perspective and vision have helped ERS sort out priorities and address today's issues and prepare us for tomorrow's.

Finally, Bob sets an example for all of us with his personal attributes. He is honest, constructive in his critique, and generous in his judgment of others. Those who have worked with him know him to be sincere, friendly, and stimulating. And he is proud of his family's farming heritage.

Bob joins his predecessors as USDA's chief economists (Willard Cochrane, Nate Koffsky, Walter Wilcox, Don Paarlberg, Howard Hjort, and Bill Leshner and their deputies) in establishing and maintaining a tradition of keeping ERS politically neutral and intellectually honest. Important lessons can be learned from each of these leaders.

Bob, the people of ERS wish you and your family well in your new assignment at Purdue. And we thank you for your friendship and leadership.

  
John Lee

## **Criteria Proposed for Evaluating Marketing Orders**

A team of university agricultural economists has proposed and evaluated appropriate performance criteria in the operation of Federal marketing orders for fruits, vegetables, nuts, and specialty commodities. The team's proposals are a response to a report to the Congress by the General Accounting Office that urged the Secretary of Agriculture to develop and apply criteria for measuring the performance of individual marketing orders.

The team developed a framework for decisionmaking by Government officials and others regarding Federal marketing orders for the commodities studied. The team recommended that performance criteria be established separately for the three types of marketing orders: minimum quality standards, market support, and volume management.

Evaluating marketing order performance requires assessing:

- the public interest justification for Government regulation;
- the appropriateness of each type of order for solving or fulfilling perceived problems or objectives;
- the private costs and benefits; and
- equity considerations among participants in the marketing system.

Members of the team included chair Leo Polopolus (U. of Fla.), Hoy Carman (U. of Calif., Davis), Edward Jesse (U. of Wis., Madison), and James Shaffer (Mich. State U.). ERS economists Glenn Zepp (786-1770) and Richard Heifner worked closely with the team and provided liaison between it and USDA. □

## **Effects of Railroad Deregulation Studied**

ERS economist James MacDonald (786-1865) has been studying the effects of railroad deregulation (*The Staggers Rail Act of 1980*) on the transportation of grain and soybeans.

Deregulation has had two principal effects, according to MacDonald, and each has been felt primarily in the Plains States and the Pacific Northwest rather than in the Corn Belt. First, deregulation has accelerated a major shift from single-car movements of grain toward multicar and unit-train movements through the introduction of size-related rates in the Plains. The larger movements mean lower costs for railroads and lower rates for shippers. Second, deregulation has introduced some competition among railroads in rate setting, and the competition has led to further rate declines.

The effects have been weaker in the Corn Belt because competition from barges has historically kept Corn Belt rates down and forced the early introduction of unit trains. Because of competition from the unregulated barge mode, rail regulation was less effective and deregulation consequently had a smaller impact.

Competition among railroads and from barges has lowered rail rates for grain in the deregulated period except in regions (particularly the Northern Plains) that have few competing railroads and where barge facilities are distant. □

## **Growth Markets Studied**

Many consider exports to be the solution to the U.S. farm problem. Information on these markets becomes critical to the continuing U.S. farm policy debate. Will international markets for U.S. agricultural products continue to grow? Will the United States face more competition? Will markets contract, leading to a smaller U.S. agricultural sector?

Preliminary findings by ERS researchers conducting a major study of growth markets for U.S. agricultural exports indicate:

- world trade growth to the year 2000 will probably be less than during the boom of the 1970's and more in line with the global growth in economic activity and per capita income;
- ninety percent of the growth of world agricultural imports and exports is projected to be accounted for by only 20 importing and 8 exporting countries;
- the imports of the U.S.S.R. and Japan have the potential to grow most rapidly;
- the import markets of the developing countries will become increasingly important in world trade; and
- economic growth in the developing countries is the driving force changing the composition and character of global agricultural trade.

ERS researchers are also studying longer term strategic issues. What initiatives can the United States take to influence world economic growth and income and thus growth in world markets for agricultural products? What initiatives can the United States take to claim a large proportion of the growth markets in the developing countries? For more information, contact Lon Cesal (786-1705). □



## Personnel Notes

### Quance Returns As Branch Chief

Leroy Quance is the new chief, Africa/Middle East Branch, International Economics Division (IED). Quance joined ERS's Farm



Carolyn Riley

Production Economics Division in 1967 at Okla. State U. to conduct research on aggregate supply analysis. He transferred to Washington with the Natural Resource Economics Division in 1971, working on long-range projections in support of the Soil Conservation Service and Water Resources Council's resource planning and assessment work.

In 1973, Quance became program leader for economic projections and analytical systems in the National Economic Analysis Division. When IED was formed in 1979, Quance became a section leader in its Trade Policy Branch. In 1981, Quance joined the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Rome as Director of the Statistics Division, where he

served until returning to ERS. Quance has B.S. and M.S. degrees from Okla. State U. and a Ph.D. from Mich. State U. □

### Bowers Is New Section Leader

Douglas Bowers is the new leader of the Agriculture and Rural History Section, National Economy and Rural History Branch, Agriculture and Rural Economics Division. He has been an ERS historian since he began working in ERS while in graduate school in 1968.

Bowers received his Ph.D. in American history from the U. of Chicago in 1974. He has written widely about agricultural history in such areas as transportation, USDA administration, and agricultural interest groups. On his own time, he has been pursuing studies of American legislative history.

Bowers is supervising a study on the history of USDA programs since 1961. He has coauthored a reference work on price supports,



Carolyn Riley

*History of Agricultural Price-Support Adjustment Programs, 1933-1984*, and has written articles for such periodicals as *Agricultural Outlook*, *National Food Review*, *Agriculture-Food Policy Review*, and *Agricultural*

*History*. He received the Woodrow Wilson Honorary Fellow in 1968 while at the U. of Md. and a USDA Certificate of Merit in 1975. □

### Buxton Is New Section Leader

Boyd Buxton is the new leader of the Fruits and Vegetables Outlook and Analysis Section of the Fruits, Vegetables, Sweeteners, and Tobacco Branch, National



Carolyn Riley

Economics Division (NED). Buxton's entire professional career has been with ERS. He joined ERS in 1963 at the U. of Minn., where he worked on national dairy policy and production and marketing issues. From 1969 to 1973, he was the North Central Region field group leader. Buxton was the dairy program leader in the former Commodity Economics Division from 1973 to 1974. He transferred to Washington with NED's Animal Products Branch in 1986.

Buxton received an M.S. in agricultural economics from Wash. State U. and a Ph.D. in agricultural economics from the U. of Minn. He received a USDA Certificate of Merit for his contribution to the program of

the Commodity Economics Division and a USDA Certificate of Appreciation for his leadership and organization in conducting a study of the impact of dairy imports on the U.S. dairy industry. □

## IGIA's Henry In ERS

Richard Henry, from the Institut de Gestion Internationale Agro-Alimentaire (IGIA) of the Ecole Supérieure des Sciences



Michael Hunter

Economiques et Commerciales in Cergy-Pontoise (near Paris), is in ERS's International Economics Division (IED) for 9 months working with IED researchers on a model of the French feed-livestock sector and on developing a consistent framework to follow the implications of policy developments within the European Community.

Henry has a B.S.-equivalent from the Institut National Agronomique in Paris and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees from the U. of Calif., Davis.

As a professor at IGIA, he has taught international trade, industrial microeconomics, and econometrics. His primary interests are in the fields of trade and agricultural policies and related food industry strategies. □

## Highlights of Staff Activities

### ERS Participation in Meetings of the Southern Agricultural Economics Association and Southern Rural Sociological Association, Feb. 1-4, in Nashville

**Awards:** **Kuo Huang**, Outstanding Research Contribution for *U.S. Demand for Food: A Complete System of Price and Income Effects* (TB-1714, Dec. 1985)

• and **John McClelland**, Distinguished Contribution to the Profession by a Graduate Student.

**Paper authors:** **Mary Ahearn**, **Carlos Arnade**, **Mark Ash**, **Vera Banks**, **Carolyn Betts**, **Diane Bertelsen**, **James Blaylock**, **William Crosswhite**, **Cecil Davison**, **Kenneth Deavers**, **Praveen Dixit**, **Walter Epps**, **Richard Fallert**, **Walter Ferguson**, **Walter Gardiner**, **Herbert Gilbert**, **John Ginzel** (2), **Joseph Glauber**, **Charles Hallahan**, **John Hanchar**, **Gregory Hanson** (2), **Linwood Hoffman**, **Robert Hoppe**, **Ronald Jeremias**, **James Johnson**, **Chong Kim**, **James Langley**, **Suchada Langley**, **Dale Leuck**, **William Lin** (2), **James MacDonald**, **Michael Morehart**, **Richard Nehring**, **Gerald Plato**, **Clifford Rossi**, **Michael Salassi**, **Scott Sanford**, **Parveen Setia** (visiting professor from the U. of Ill.), **Matthew Smith**, **Philip Szmedra** (2), **Lloyd Teigen**, and **James Zellner**.

**Symposia organizers and moderators:** **Joyce Allen**, **Nicole Ballenger**, **Lon Cesal**, **Thomas Hady**, **James Johnson**, **James Langley**, **Suchada Langley**, **Mack Leath**, **Lester Myers**, **Mark Newman**, and **Katherine Reichelderfer**.

**Panel participants:** **Mary Ahearn**, **Thomas Carlin**, **Velmar Davis**, **Bernal Green**, **Gregory Hanson**, **David Harrington**, **James Johnson**, **Suchada Langley**, **William Lin**, **Gene Mathia**, **Mark Newman**, and **Irving Starbird**.

**Paper discussants:** **Joyce Allen**, **Robert Hoppe**, **Peggy Ross**, and **Scott Sanford**.

**Conference organizers:** **Bob Robinson** (SAEA program) and **Peggy Ross** (SRSA program). □

## Other Highlights, by ERS Division

### Agriculture and Rural Economics Division

**Herman Bluestone** participated in a research consortium on the role of entrepreneurship in rural economic growth • **David Brown** spoke to the National Governors' Association on the changing economic and demographic context of rural policy • **Thomas Carlin** discussed nonfarm sources of income at a "New Agenda for Rural America" conference, in St. Paul • **Ron Durst** presented a paper on tax reform to the Western Farm Management Extension Committee, in San Francisco • **David Freshwater** presented a paper on "Policy Options for Providing Financial Assistance to the Farm Credit System" at a meeting of the Regional Project on Land Values (NC-123) • **Gregory Gajewski**, **Jerome Stam**, and **David Trechter** participated in a meeting of the Regional Project on Financing Agriculture in a Changing Environment: Macro, Market, Policy, and Management Issues (NC-161), in St. Paul • **Bernal Green** and **Patrick Sullivan** presented papers at a conference on "Coping With Change—Rural America in



Transition," sponsored by the Foundation for Future Choices, in Minneapolis • **David Harrington** and **Jerome Stam** participated in a conference on financial stress in agriculture, sponsored by the American Agricultural Economics Association, in Kansas City • **Bob Hoppe** is spending six months at the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of the Census working with data from the *Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)*

• **Ronald Jeremias** presented a paper on "Farm Income, the Federal Deficit, and the Value Added Tax" at a conference on the status of agriculture, in Charlottesville

• **Norwood Kerr** presented a paper on "The History of the State Agricultural Experiment Stations" to a meeting of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, in Phoenix

• **Richard Reeder** and **Patrick Sullivan** participated in a conference on the roles and tools of government for public works, sponsored by the National Council of Public Works Improvement • and **Norman Reid** spoke on "Frameworks for Rural Policymaking" to a conference sponsored by the Council of State Governments, in Orlando. □

### *International Economics Division*

**Lorna Aldrich** met with Janet Speck of the Economic Bureau, Planning and Analysis Staff, U.S. Department of State, to discuss trends in European Community (EC) exports to non-EC countries

• **Aldrich** also was interviewed by Wendy Wall of the *Wall Street Journal* on the effects of the EC's common agricultural policy on U.S. agriculture and trade • **Nicole Ballenger**, **Sally Byrne**, **Barbara**

**Chattin**, **William Coyle**, **Dale Leuck**, **Carl Mabbs-Zeno**, and **David Peacock** briefed staff of the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative on details of ERS's trade liberalization research • **Ballenger**, **Walter Gardiner**, **Mary Anne Normile**, **Vernon Roning**, **Nancy Schwartz**, **Mathew Shane**, and **Jerry Sharples** presented papers at the winter meeting of the International Agricultural Trade Research Consortium, at the headquarters of the Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maiz y Trigo (CIMMYT), in El Batán, México • **Richard Brown** spoke to the U.S. Produce Marketing Association about the potential for fresh fruit and vegetable trade with the Caribbean Basin Initiative countries • **Lon Cesal** participated in a meeting of the Food Aid Strategy Think Tank Group, which includes representatives from commodity groups and government agencies • **Cesal**, **John Dunmore**, and **Kelley White** met with USDA's Assistant Secretary for Economics Robert Thompson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economics Ewen Wilson, and Special Assistant to the President for Agricultural Trade Alan Tracy to discuss the potential role ERS analysts might play in Tracy's forthcoming report to the President and Congress on agricultural export markets and programs • **Cheryl Christensen** participated in a conference of USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service agricultural counselors and attachés from Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, in Brussels • **Nancy Cochran** presented a paper on "Eastern European Feed Grain Demand" and **Kenneth Gray** presented a paper on "Soviet Agricultural Reforms" at the annual meeting of the National Association for Slavic Studies, in New Orleans • **William Coyle**, USDA's Assistant Secretary for

Economics Robert Thompson, Delbert Fitchett (World Bank), Derwent Renshaw (EC Commission), and U.S. Senator Rudy Boschwitz participated on a panel (sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs) that discussed problems of agricultural overcapacity in industrialized countries • **Robert Cummings** participated in a symposium on "Poland—To the Year 2000," in Pittsburgh • **Elaine Grigsby** traveled to Brazil and Argentina to evaluate the impacts of debt burdens and new economic policies on agricultural production and marketing in those countries

• **Stephen Haley** spent 2 weeks at Purdue U. working with Philip Abbott on an overview paper for an upcoming ERS workshop on "Linkages Between National Resources and International Trade in Agricultural Commodities"

• **Michael Kurtzig** met with Turkey's Agricultural Counselor Orhan Turkoz to discuss a proposed purchase by Turkey of U.S. cattle • **Kurtzig** also was interviewed by Wendy Wall of the *Wall Street Journal* on the agricultural situation and recent policy changes in Turkey • **John Link** participated in Agriculture Canada's annual outlook conference, in Ottawa • **Carmen Nohre** and **Francis Tuan** participated in USDA interagency planning meetings for the 1987 U.S.-China scientific and technology exchange programs • and **Tuan** also met with Chao-lin Wu of China's Ministry of Agriculture to discuss a proposal to send a Chinese delegation to the United States to study U.S. farmer cooperatives and family-farm management techniques. □

Address Correction Requested

## **ERS** NEWSLETTER

### *National Economics Division*

**Eldon Ball** presented a seminar on modeling commodity supply response of multiproduct industries to staff of the Congressional Budget Office • **Kenneth Baum** and **Lee Christensen** participated in the International Poultry Trade Show, in Atlanta • **Baum, Ronald Gustafson, James Miller, and Leland Southard** participated in Agriculture Canada's annual outlook conference, in Ottawa • **James Blaylock** and **Lester Myers** participated in a meeting of the Subcommittee on Data Sources for Demand Analysis of the Regional Project on U.S. Food Demand and Consumption Behavior (S-165), in Nashville • **Lee Christensen** participated in "Turkey Day," a meeting of Virginia, Ohio, and Minnesota turkey producers, processors, and university poultry scientists, in Harrisonburg (Va.) • **Edward Glade, John Lawler, Irving Starbird, and Harold Stults** participated in the 1987 Beltwide Cotton Conference, in Dallas • **John Hackett** met with Earl Johnson of the House Select Committee on Hunger to discuss the availability of food stores in rural and low income

areas • **Rosanna Morrison** and **Tanya Roberts** met with Sandra Heilperu of the Australian Consumers Association to discuss the safety of food irradiation • **Roberts** and **David Smallwood** attended a meeting with USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and Mich. State U. (MSU) researchers to discuss progress and further research plans for the MSU/U. of Mo. Swine Health Information Management System (SHIMS) Project • and **Glenn Zepp** participated in a task force charged by the *Immigration and Control Act of 1986* with defining "perishable commodities." □

### *Natural Resource Economics Division*

**Klaus Alt** and **John Putman** presented a paper on "Incorporating Crop Yield Impacts of Soil Erosion Into Policy Analyses" at a joint meeting of the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America, in New Orleans • **Linda Lee** is participating on a task force of the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology studying the long-term outlook for U.S. agriculture

• **Katherine Reichelderfer** met with the National Academy of Sciences' National Research Council (NRC) to explore the possibilities of an NRC study on water marketing • **Philip Szmedra** presented a paper on "Evaluating Risks of Pest Management Strategies" at a meeting of the American Society of Agricultural Engineers, in Chicago • and **Gene Wunderlich** was interviewed by the Voice of America on current changes in ownership of farmland. □

### *Office of the Administrator*

**Milton Ericksen** participated in the Australian National Agricultural Outlook Conference, in Canberra • **Bob Robinson** met with the Western Regional Council of the Joint Council on Food and Agricultural Sciences, in Reno • **Robinson** also spoke on the world agricultural situation and outlook at a conference of USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service agricultural counselors and attachés from Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, in Brussels • and **Robinson** also participated in the South Carolina Agricultural Outlook and Policy Conference, in Columbia. □